

13m
Mexico

1315
NOV 18 1948



Keys TO THE MEXICAN SOUL

By Pastor Alvin H. Koehler

Director of the work in the United States
and Old Mexico



Published under the auspices of
EL MENSAJERO LUTERANO
1921 Saunders Avenue
San Antonio 7, Texas

Sponsors:

Lutheran Pastors Conference of
San Antonio

Women's Missionary Federation of the
American Lutheran Church.

Keys to the Mexican Soul

INTRODUCTION

In doing missionary work among a foreign people, it is imperative that he who brings the gospel of Jesus to that people, become acquainted with them through a study of their background, religious and otherwise, their customs, traditions and superstitions, in order to know how best to approach them and present the gospel to them. A knowledge of these things will serve him as keys to the soul of the people among whom he is working.

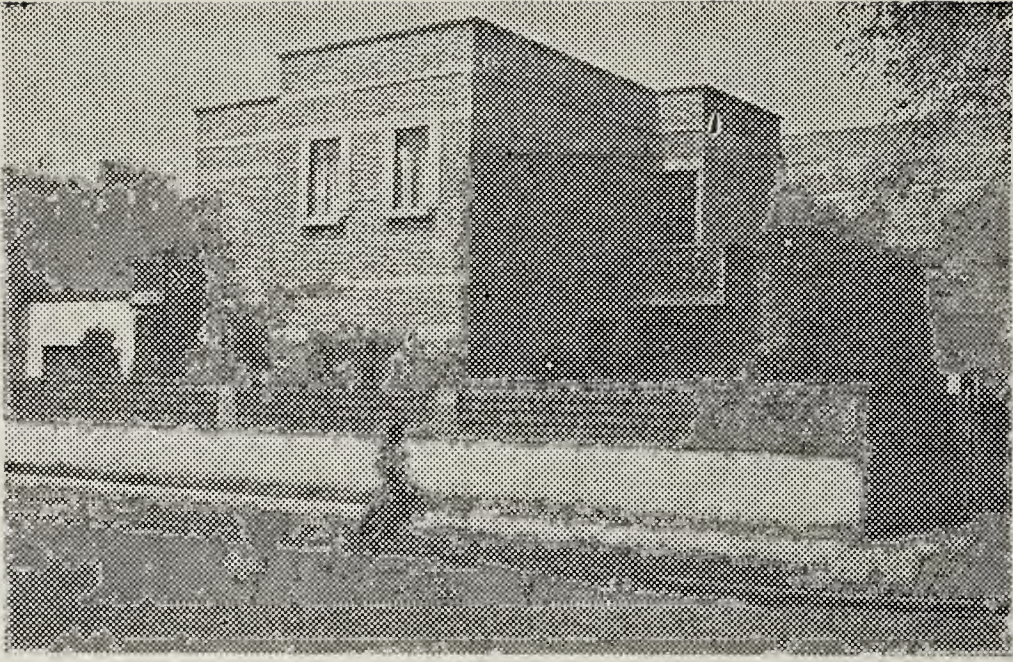
A. BACKGROUND.

The subject of this pamphlet is: Keys to the Mexican Soul. I shall try to present to you something of the background of the Mexican race, some of its customs and traditions and superstitions. These things must be taken into consideration on approaching the Mexican with the desire to win his soul for Christ. They are the avenues through which we can reach him, and the keys which unlock his heart. It would be futile to try to force upon him our own customs and traditions, believing that thereby we would more easily and more quickly win him for the Kingdom of God. It is not our work to teach the Mexican to imitate us, but rather to reach him with the gospel of peace and pardon that the Holy Spirit may change his heart. In order to do that we shall have to find avenues through which we may reach him, or keys which will unlock his soul to the treasures of God's Word.

Going back into the history of Mexico, which is very dear to all Mexican people, we discover many things which helped to develop them into the race it is today. At the time of the landing of the Pilgrims there lived in our own country a very primitive people, the Indians. However, when Cortez of Spain landed on the shores of Mexico in 1520, a hundred years before the landing of the Pilgrims, he found the Aztec Indians, who had culture, organized religious life and had their god, Huitzilipostli. To this god, hungry for human hearts, many young people were supposedly sacrificed in order to appease his anger.

SPANIARDS AND CATHOLIC CHURCH

Soon afterwards came the Spaniards and with them the Catholic Church. The history of this church would have us believe that in a short time all of Mexico had been made Christian. However, what had happened? The Indians in many instances indeed ceased their human sacrifices, but merely substituted the names of the saints of the Catholic church for the names of their idols and gods. In Mexico today, where religious festivals are held under the direction of the Catholic church, especially among the Indians of the mountains, it is a question whether they are actually worshipping the saints or whether they are thinking of their former gods, when they perform their dances. Many, no doubt, were baptized by the church, without knowing what was taking place, and these were added to the membership of the church.



Pastor Luna's residence in southern part of Mexico City



Pastor Gonzalez and congregation in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico

We can readily understand that that type of missionary work did not bring anyone to Christ, the Savior of the world, but merely brought an outward adherence to a church, a complying with certain rituals and ceremonies, without having an understanding of them, without knowing God, much less the Savior. Thus the masses were brought into the church, not into the Kingdom of God, without a change of heart, without faith in the Savior, without a sense of obligation to God and Church.

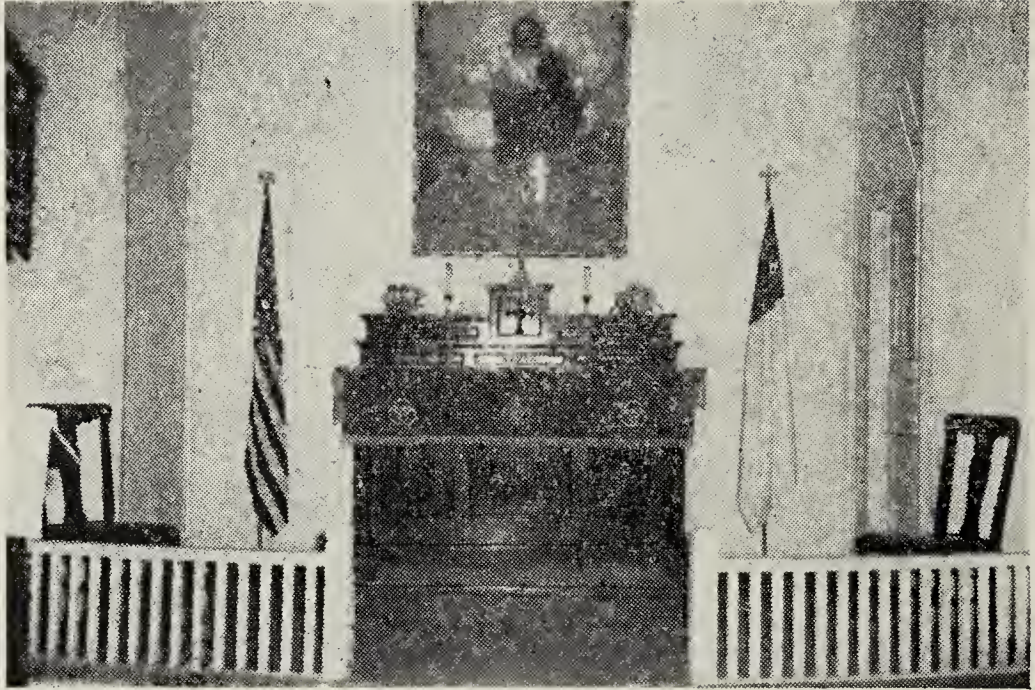
EFFECTS OF CATHOLICISM

This kind of religion has imbedded itself, yes, has gone over into the flesh and blood of the Mexican, and has been practiced for generations. Christianity to many simply means this: To have the children baptized by the priest, if possible; to go to mass occasionally; to be married by the priest, if financially able; at death quickly to call the priest that he might perform the sacrament of extreme unction and conduct the funeral. If the priest is not called in time and death has taken place, the dead are often buried without the services of the church. This happens in Texas today. This kind of Christianity (if one can call it Christianity at all) stands like a brick wall between the Mexican and his acceptance of Christ the Savior. In many instances he thinks he is a Christian, and any Protestant missionary is made to feel that his efforts to try to win him for the Kingdom of God are in vain.

GUADALUPE—ISM

In addition to this, the Catholic religion in Mexico is built on a legend. Enter any Mexican Catholic home, even if Catholic only by name, and you will find, in one form or another, the image of their saint Guadalupe. The legend is this: Centuries ago a young Indian, Juan Diego, had a vision while on his way to mass early one morning. Supposedly the virgin Mary appeared to him, and asked him to inform the bishop that he erect a church on the spot where she had appeared. The bishop refused to believe the young man, so on the following morning Mary appeared to the Indian again with the same request. The bishop still would not believe the young Indian. The third morning she appeared again, and this time asked Juan Diego to ascend the barren hill close by to pick flowers and take them to the bishop. The Indian climbed the hill and on it had appeared beautiful flowers. He gathered them and placed them into the large shawl the virgin had given him. Juan hurried to the bishop and when he opened the shawl, instead of flowers he found the beautiful image of the virgin. She was dark complexioned, since she had appeared to an Indian, and therefore was called Guadalupe. Today she is the saint of all Mexico and of every Mexican home that still calls itself Catholic. Thousands of pictures, statues and images of this saint have appeared all over Mexico. Many homes have erected altars to her honor, and burn candles day and night before her statue. Prayers are said daily to her. Churches and cathedrals have been erected in honor of her. Visit some of the larger churches of Mexico and you find nothing or very little of Christ, only Guadalupe, the mother of Mexico. Thousands know nothing but Guadalupe.

School at Donna, Texas. Parsonage in background. Pastor Arnold Wueritz, Missionary.



Chapel at San Antonio, Texas. Pastor Kurt Hartmann, Missionary

Chapel at Escobares, Texas, Pastor German Vazquez, Missionary.



PRESENT SITUATION IN MEXICO

On a recent visit to Mexico City we had the privilege of visiting the shrine of Guadalupe. Its large beautiful church has been built on the very location where the virgin was supposed to have appeared to Juan Diego. Its huge altar of gold and silver displays the large picture of the virgin, supposedly the original given to Diego many years ago. People from all parts of Mexico come to worship her, making vows, fulfilling promises. They crawl on their knees from the entrance of the church to the altar, reciting Ave Marias. Having reached the altar they return home, believing that the virgin has blessed them and they have done their duty as Christians.

The "Daily Bulletin" distributed in one of the principal hotels in Mexico City, dated July 26, 1947, contained a page listing the various churches and announcing the hours of worship. I quote one announcement from this bulletin: "The Basilica of our Lady of Guadalupe on the outskirts of Mexico City is the most famous religious sanctuary in all the Americas. The Virgin of Guadalupe is worshipped all through the Latin Americas. Services in the Basilica are continuous all day Sunday."

THE LITTLE VIRGIN IN TEXAS

About six miles from San Juan there is a shrine today that is attracting hundreds of Mexicans from all parts of the Rio Grande Valley and from the rest of the state of Texas. The story goes like this: One evening a mother living in a small Mexican settlement, noticed a light in the field nearby. She went out to investigate. She found a small stone on which was engraved a colored image of the virgin Guadalupe. She took it home, placed it in her house, made an altar for it, and today hundreds of Mexicans visit the little virgin, pray to her, make promises and leave offerings of every description. The priest of a nearby town is supposed to have blessed the image and told the family that God favored them in a very special way by sending this image from heaven. Likenesses of the virgin have appeared all about the house of this shrine, on flowers, on leaves, —they would have us believe— and even on tortillas the woman made.

That is Christianity to thousands of Mexicans in Mexico and Texas today!

B. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Now let us look at a few general characteristics of the Mexican people.

1.—The first one we want to mention is DISTRUST. To a large degree Mexicans live in distrust of one another. In many localities it is difficult to organize any kind of a club or society because of this distrust. In Mexico, for example, where a short time ago we helped our missionary rent a house in which to live and conduct services, we learned that in renting a house either we had to find a property owner of Mexico City who would sign the lease and pay the rent in case we failed to pay, or we had to deposit three month's rent with the owner. The man who signs the contract is called a "fiador", and the rent money deposited is known as



Lutheran Bible School

American L

“fianza”. Perhaps if people had more “confianza”, trust, there would have to be less “fianza”, security.

The Mexican has learned to distrust a stranger, even though he is very hospitable upon first meeting him. The Mexican has been exploited so many times, that he looks with suspicion upon practically everything new.

This characteristic has a direct bearing on missionary work among the Mexican people. A missionary must first of all win the confidence of the people, and that takes time. In fact there is very little he can do with these people until he has made himself known through contacts or by living with them for a time and letting them observe him in his daily life. Only then can he finally win their confidence.

Let it also be stated that once you have won his confidence, having shown him that you are his friend and that you have come only to do him good and help him, you have won a true friend.

2.—FEAR is another characteristic. This is closely related to superstition. The Mexican fears the supernatural, and he interprets many happenings in life as supernatural.

3.—PREJUDICE is a close relative of fear. The Mexican is readily offended and this causes much of his prejudice. However, I am certain that, if there were less criticism of the Mexican, and more were done by Christians to help raise his standard of living, much more would be accomplished to eliminate prejudice, and many more Mexicans would find their way into a higher level of society.

“He is just a Mexican, anything is good enough for him”, is a statement which has done nothing to help, but has done much to harm our own attitude towards him, and has done much harm in the mind of the Mexican also. As long as that attitude exists we are never going to understand him better, neither will he understand us.



San Juan Church

San Juan, Texas

Mispronouncing his name wilfully is enough to offend the Mexican causing him to become prejudiced to everything we may want to do for him in the future. There is the danger that when he is offended he neither forgives nor forgets, but seeks revenge.

4.—“THE MEXICAN SEEKS THE LINE OF LEAST RESISTANCE”. He looks for things that are immediate, easy to attain. He is a fatalist: “What happens in life had to happen.” This is carried out to extremes in many cases. A girl that goes wrong was destined to go wrong; a man who is killed in a brawl was destined to be killed. That makes life easy for him; he need assume very little responsibility. This makes the work of the missionary so much more difficult, because hardly anything makes an impression on the Mexican.

5.— THE MEXICAN IS HOSPITABLE. When you enter his home he proves himself a very gracious host. He will bring out the best chair for you, and will try to make you feel very much at home. He is honored by your visit and will always ask you to return. He who has won the confidence of a Mexican family will always find a ready welcome.

C. FAMILY LIFE

Now take a brief glance at his family life. There exists a bond of love that ties members of the family very closely together, in spite of the fact that sometimes the parents have little control over the boys in the home.

The Mexican parent very zealously guards the wishes of his children and sees to it that they receive everything they desire. This may border on selfishness, but nevertheless, there exists this strong bond of love between members of the family. Mexicans are often under the influence of their parents even after they have married. This fact sometimes makes our work difficult. A mother or a father who does not favor our mission,



Chapel at Elsa, Texas. Pastor Oscar A. Salge, Missionary

will keep their older sons and daughter at home and refuse to let them become members of the mission, even though the children would readily join our church.

Orphans left at the death of father or mother, or both, are usually taken into the home of a relative or friend, in spite of the fact that this relative or friend may have a large family and no room to take care of his own family.

D. SUPERSTITIONS

Let us briefly examine a few of the most common superstitions. Someone said: "Give a Mexican an old bone or a relic, and tell him it is from a saint, and he will build an altar and worship it."

1.— There is, first of all, what Mexicans call the "EVIL EYE". They believe that every adult has the power to bewitch little children, some to a greater, others to a lesser, degree. To admire a little child, whether it is in its mother's arms, in its home or on the street, without placing one's hand on the head and face of the child, casts over it an evil spirit, which may cause illness or even death. The only way to take the evil spirit from the child or avoid its being overcome by the spirit, is to place your hand on its head or over its face. A Latin-American public school teacher on her way to school one morning, passed a little girl playing in the yard. She spoke to the child and, of course, admired it. At noon the mother sent word to the teacher to come by the house and break the spell she had cast over the child by touching it. Some of our neighbors asked that we bring our little girl over to them, in order that they might touch it, fearing that they would cause illness in the child, because they had admired it and had not had the privilege of touching its face. On other occasions the hands of many were placed on the little child's head and face, because they considered it beautiful and did not want to cast the evil spirit over it.

2.—DEATH AND FUNERALS bring to light many superstitions. Some men refuse to shave from the time of death of a person until after the funeral has taken place. Others will not attend funeral services, neither visit the home of the deceased, because they may have an infection or open sore, which will surely become worse because they have attended a funeral. Mirrors in the homes are usually removed at the time of death of a member of the family, or are turned toward the wall. Lights are kept burning day and night over the body, in order to guide the soul of the departed.

3.—Mix these and many more superstitions with the Catholic religion, and you have a picture of the background of most of the people with whom we work. Let this mixture penetrate into the life and ways of the Mexican for a period of generations, even centuries, and you will understand why missionary work is slow and requires an immense amount of patience. A tradition, a superstition, or a custom that has had that length of time to go over into the flesh and blood of a people, is not going



Chapel at Alice, Texas.



Chapel at Edinburg, Texas. Mr. Roger Hazen, Lay-Missionary

to vanish from its midst in one generation, neither in two. Consider that the large majority of Mexicans here and in Mexico cling to these things, and that only a small group has become Christian in that they have confessed Christ, and dared to break away from this slavery into which the entire race has fallen, and you will understand that the Mexican Christian does not find it easy to live among his fellowmen and be a Christian. May the Spirit of God fortify this small group that they remain faithful and bring many others to the saving faith.

E.—THE ONE THING THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Only through persistent preaching and teaching of a POSITIVE GOSPEL of love and peace and pardon IN CHRIST JESUS, will our church be able to break down and remove these obstacles in the life of the Mexican in generations to come. A negative preaching, a condemning of those things which the Mexican has practised for years, will only antagonize him, and will build up a wall of resistance to the Gospel of Jesus. Show them in a positive way what Jesus has done for them, because the Father in Heaven loved them, show them the practical side of Christianity by word and life, and persist in these things with all patience and love for the soul of the Mexican, and Christ will take possession of his heart and cause to vanish everything that is not of Him.

CONCLUSION

Let us use these keys to the soul of the Mexican in order to bring him to the only power on earth which will enable him to break away from darkness and enter into the light of God's Kingdom, for the Mexican also has a soul bought through the bitter suffering and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ crucified for our sins, raised again from the dead for our justification.



The pictures herein included show that, while we have done something for these people in the past and are doing something at present, there is room for improvement and expansion. A number of the buildings which we have were built with funds from the Women's Missionary Federation of the American Lutheran Church. Many thanks to the generosity of this group within the church!

However, besides more and better physical equipment, we need more workers, teachers, parish workers, ordained men. It is our hope that wherever this leaflet is read and studied hearts will be warmed for the cause of Christ among these people.



Chapel at El Capote, Texas.
Near the "Sleepy Rio Grande"



Pastor Koehler
serves missions
at El Capote and
San Juan

Chapel at San
Juan, Texas

Chapel at Campo Alto, Texas.
Lay Worker Manuel Alanis in
charge



